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SUBJECT: Panama Environmental Team in Disaray as it Prepares for Copenhagen

REF: NOVEMBER 27 WHA/EPSC COLON EMAIL; SAN JOSE 1056

11. (SBU) Summary: Panama's National Authority for the Environment will not lead the Panama delegation to Copenhagen and has lost the support of the Panamanian environmental NGO community. Additionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a new environmental point of contact who is getting up to speed on the issues. End Summary.

12. (SBU) ECONOFF delivered reftel A talking points to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MIREX) Director for Conferences and International Organizations Tomas Guardia on December 3. Guardia, the point of contact for MIREX on environmental policy, has been in the position for three weeks. He said that the GOP delegation would be led by the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Meliton Arrocha, National Authority for the Environment (ANAM) Director for Climate Change Leslie Marin (for only the first week), himself (for the second week), a small number of ANAM technical specialists, and Oscar Vallarino, Executive Manager of the Environment Division of the Panama Canal Authority (ACP). The head of ANAM, Javier Arias, will not participate in the meeting. (Note: Rumors of Arias' dismissal have been rampant for the past six weeks, were strengthened after a reportedly forced purge a few weeks ago, and will only be strengthened more by being left off of this delegation list.) The involvement of the ACP is to address Panama's top climate change issue, bunker fuel emissions, which the GOP would like addressed in the International Maritime Organization; approximately 23 percent of ships sail under the Panamanian flag. Guardia said that the GOP appreciated US support and leadership on climate change, and was particularly pleased that President Obama will attend the Copenhagen summit. He was unfamiliar with what occurred in Guatemala (reftel B) when Panama declined to sign a G77-inspired document. He had no insight about how to achieve a pragmatic and realistic outcome in Copenhagen.

13. (SBU). ECONOFF met with Leslie Marin, ANAM Director for Climate Change on November 25. Marin downplayed the results in Guatemala, but highlighted that the countries of Central America are vulnerable and need resources to adapt to climate change. Marin said several times that he is optimistic that agreement will be reached in Copenhagen around the "shared vision" proposal. Regarding bunker fuel emissions, Marin said that Panama could not agree that flag countries should pay for these emissions. However, Marin's focus on climate change issues appears to be procedural rather than substantive, such as increasing NGO involvement in the GOP climate change discussion, including getting them added to the National Committee on Climate Change, and publishing the National Communication about Climate Change, last published in 2000.

14. (SBU) The meetings with the GOP followed a November 12 briefing to 15 environmental NGOs by ECONOFF. At the briefing, the NGOs

focused on the mechanisms by which developed countries will help developing countries adapt to and mitigate changes due to climate change, questioned how Panama could have an impact on the global climate change discussion, and lamented that they are outside of the GOP decision-making process. They expressed their appreciation for US engagement and leadership in climate change, and for the briefing. Likely as a result of this meeting at the Embassy, Marin briefed the environmental NGOs for the first time on the administration's environmental policies on November 27.

15. (U) However, the outreach by ANAM to the environmental NGOs appears to be too late. On December 2, fourteen NGOs, including four briefed by the Embassy, sent a letter to President Martinelli urging him to take concrete actions to protect the environment. They called on him to follow through on his promises made during his presidential campaign and since taking office on July 1 by promoting renewable energy; revising mining regulations to protect vulnerable areas; encouraging sustainable development which does not negatively affect mangroves, beaches, and forests; and strengthening environmental institutions, specifically ANAM. (Note: The absence of climate change as a specific issue identified by the NGOs appears to highlight their focus on local issues and how low their expectations are for the GOP in Copenhagen.) The letter made the front page of Panama's paper of record, La Prensa.

16. (SBU) Comment: Post will engage with the Government of Panama when and where appropriate to increase its knowledge of the US climate change position, but it does not appear that Panama will field a team that will be a strong ally in Copenhagen.
STEPHENSON